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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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RECENTLY the question of an Old Testament History was discussed in these pages. It was indicated that before such a history could be worked out, it would first be necessary to present separately a treatment of the three great elements which compose the Old Testament, namely, the Prophetic, the Legal and the Wisdom elements.

Of these three the Prophetic evidently stands first because it constitutes the largest part of the divine revelation recorded in the Old Testament. Open the page where we will, prophecy presents itself even in those divisions where it would be least expected. The Legal element is everywhere covered with the dress of prophecy. The Prophetic material of Genesis leads up to legislation. The Book of Deuteronomy itself not only has a prophetic setting, but breathes throughout the prophetic spirit. The Psalter is not usually regarded as Prophetic, but is it not a fact that the best Psalms, those most frequently read and those which when read are most helpful, are prophetic even in the narrowest sense of the term? Are the sufferings of the ideal one more clearly depicted elsewhere than in the twenty-second, or the victories and triumphs of the ideal king more definitely presented than in the seventy-second and one hundred and tenth Psalms? Least of all would one expect the prophetic element in the Book of Job, and yet this book furnishes us a prophetic character,—Eliphaz the Temanite, who himself tells us :

"Now a thing was secretly brought to me,  
 And mine ear received a whisper thereof.  
 In thoughts from the visions of the night,  
 When deep sleep falleth on men,  
 Fear came upon me and trembling,  
 Which made all my bones to shake.  
 Then a wind passed before my face ;  
 The hair of my flesh stood up.  
 It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof ;  
 A form was before mine eyes,  
 I heard a still voice :  
 ' Shall mortal man be just before God ?  
 Shall man be pure before his maker ? ' "

The Priestly element with its law and ceremonial ; the Wisdom element with its philosophical inquiry into the problems which trouble the observing mind, are very distinct from the Prophetic, but both are small in comparison with the Prophetic.

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THE PROPHETIC portion of Scripture of all portions comes into closest connection with the life and heart of our humanity. What do men in general care for the abrogated Levitical system ? It is interesting if viewed from the archæological point of view. It is important as showing God's method of dealing with the infant church. But where, the question is continually raised, does it touch us to-day ? How many, after all, in time of affliction go to the Book of Job for comfort, or in time of despondency and doubt seek help from the experience of Koheleth ? The whole world has produced no such book as that of Job ; and in all literature there is no truer, no more pathetic record of the experience of a storm-tossed soul than that contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes ; and yet, both seem far removed from us.

The stories of Scripture, one remarks, have moved and interested men of every age and of every kind of life. These stories find entrance to the heart and appeal to it at a time when the mind is capable of receiving nothing else ; they remain in it and cling to it long after all else is forgotten. Have not the Scripture stories come closer to man, and have they not done more for man than any other literature, sacred or profane ? This is true ;

but the fact is that the Scripture stories are in the strictest sense of the term prophecy. And so of the prophetic portions of our Scriptures it may be said, that they are bound up more than any other with our lives; they strike us at more points, and make revelation seem more precious.

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It is still further true that the prophetic portions of Scripture most clearly show us God. This every one will grant. God is seen, to be sure, in the types and shadows of the Levitical system; he appears in Wisdom literature, silencing Job out of the thunder-storm; but do not our best ideas, our clearest conceptions of him come, so far as the Old Testament is concerned, from the study of the consecrated lives of his prophets; from the great moral truths which they taught; from the principles which seem to underlie their work; from the distinct and definite revelations of his attributes which they make? Imagine for a moment the Old Testament with the prophetic element omitted. What a void in our understanding of God's character and providential dealings, even with the New Testament in our hands! If we would know and understand God, his methods, his love, his holiness, his attitude toward the righteous and the wicked, his treatment of individuals and of nations, we must take great care not to neglect in this study the prophetic element, for here God may be seen most clearly.

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IN ANY study or in any presentation of the prophetic element, it must be remembered that the word "prophecy" is used in its broadest sense. Perhaps no better definition of it has been given than that it is "the declaration of the illustration of the principles of divine government." These principles had been revealed to men called prophets; men whose function it was to speak *for* God. In declaring the great and eternal principles which had been committed to them, the illustrative method was adopted. Material from the past is gathered together, emphasis being placed upon that part of the material which most definitely teaches the principles it was desired to inculcate. The prophetic

element includes therefore the great field of historiography, and the history of the Old Testament found in Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings may be understood only when one reads these books as prophetic histories; that is, histories written to teach religious truths; histories, therefore, made up of that particular kind of material, and put together in that particular form, which would best accomplish this purpose.

From the immediate surroundings of the prophet, illustrations were continually presenting themselves. His own life was in itself a great religious lesson. Events of individual and of national importance lent themselves readily to his use as rapidly as they took place, in the prophetic life and in the methods adopted by the prophets for the presentation of truth. All this constitutes another division of what may be called the prophetic element. It is in this connection also that one must consider prophetic politics and prophetic social science. The prophets were in nearly every instance politicians. The state was from every point of view the kingdom of God, and this was their chief concern. The relation of the state to foreign countries, its internal relations, the succession of dynasties, the integrity of those who held office — all this stood most closely connected with the direct work of the preacher. Shall Israel remain dependent upon Assyria, or join with Egypt on equal terms? Shall this dynasty continue, or shall a new king be placed on the throne? Shall the state surrender, or continue to oppose the invading host? The prophets were always ready to answer these questions and to take the responsibility connected with the answer. The history of Israel and Judah might almost be said to be the history of prophetic politics. But the prophet was also concerned for the widow and the fatherless; for the poor and oppressed. There would seem to be no modern question of social science which was not suggested to him. In his day there were monopolies and he finds it necessary to speak of them. In his day the dependent classes were ill-treated by the wealthy. This, too, receives his attention. In his mind there was always the picture of that time ahead when all men should be at peace. The prophets were close observers and their observations must

be taken into account in any effort of modern times to settle the problems called social problems. The influence of their work is seen to-day in the ideas which are embodied in the minds of those who have descended from Israel of old.

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WE ARE accustomed to look to wisdom literature for the philosophy of the Old Testament. The sages were realists; humanists. The true philosophy of the Old Testament will be found in the idealism of the prophets. Their philosophy was a theology, and in their theology the most important doctrine was the immanence of God, a doctrine which to-day is taught by science. All this shows, though imperfectly, how much must be included in the prophetic element. Nor is this all. There is the study and the presentation of these great ideas from the small beginnings in Israel's earliest history down through the centuries to the time when all prophecy was fulfilled in the coming of the great prophet. And to this we must add the interpretation of the past and of the present by the inspired writers of the New Testament. When one begins to realize the magnitude and the significance of the prophetic element in Scripture, it becomes more clear that before any satisfactory treatment of Old Testament history can be made, this division of the subject must have long and careful attention.